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ABSTRACT

An examination of the technique of Family Reconstruction employed by Satir and others attempting to establish an appreciation of the client's personhood through the understanding of their parents' personhood is presented. In addition, the feeling of continuity with the family and the facilitation of integration is explored to further reveal the source of past patterns of behavior in the client by examining the patterns in the family of origin. Family reconstructions done in large groups working with a particular individual on his particular family without actual family members present is analyzed through case studies to show how family members witness the attempts of their own parents and children to understand their personhood. The use of the family, fact chronology, family portrait, family stress ballet, and family sculpting as reconstruction tools is described and explained as a means to explore past patterns of behavior. (Author)

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Using Family Reconstruction Techniques with Families in Therapy*

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Techniques of family reconstruction attempt to establish an appreciation of the client's own personhood through some understanding of the personhood of their parents. Reconstruction techniques emphasize the explication of family patterns in a number of different dimensions with the assumption that information about these patterns will be useful in understanding the current prevailing forces in the family in treatment.

In recent years, there has been a great expansion and development of techniques which can be considered as reconstructive. This paper will explore some of the techniques which can now be thought of as reconstruction techniques and some thoughts about their use in family treatment.

For the most part in the past, reconstruction techniques, most notably, those of Satir have been utilized in groups where an individual will use a technique to reveal to them some part of their own family's pattern. Traditionally the person will select other members of the training group to portray members of their family and to enact the role of themselves. The person will then observe the scene and experience subjectively and objectively. Although this is an incredibly powerful experience for the individual, it is up to that person to make the personal connections with the families.

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More recently, some reconstruction techniques have actually involved families in therapy so that all members can observe and potentially benefit from the reconstruction experience. These "re-constructions" are frequently not explicit enactments of family scenes, but rather symbolic or experiential representations of the family. This will not only allow the family to observe how other family members see the family but also allow the opportunity to examine the experience of re-structuring the family constellation and forces.

Perhaps the most popular of the techniques in the above category are family sculpting techniques of Kantor and the Duhls, and family choreography by Papp. These procedures involve family members active participation in representing the dynamics of the family through the construction of a family sculpture or a family tableaux. Critical times in the family's history are chosen by members and then constructed by various members. Discussion of the feelings involved by members of the sculpture and the sculptor are then utilized in understanding the dynamics of the family system being examined.

In addition to family choreography, I believe there to be a number of family reconstruction techniques, some used heretofore in group rather than family settings which are of immense use in the treatment of families. Some of these techniques are primarily verbal while others are non-verbal, some involve direct experience while others the recounting of past experience. The techniques described briefly below have been used with some effect in the treatment of individual families in therapy.

Family Fact Chronology. The Family Fact Chronology is a description of the major events in the history of the family taken back at least two generations. There are a number of formats for this, chronological events beginning in the past, working back from the present, or a highlight technique. All require that each family member, most especially the parents prepare some written or at least highly organized history of their family from before their birth until the present. In sessions, the parents, each individually, will present their family history to the other members of the family and then be questioned by other family members about facts and experiences. In some cases the children are not interested or capable of presenting a history, but with older children, this is possible. It is the sharing of the FFC which is of the utmost importance as it provides a wealth of information to the other family members.

CASE: A family of four, (Father, 41, an accountant, mother, 37, a housewife, Jim 14 and Susie 10) was seen because of Susie's acting out behavior at home. She became extremely upset when her mother would not do what she wanted her to do and became violent to property and in some cases had hit her brother or mother. Mother seemed very cold to Susie, and although she could understand that Susie wanted more emotion from her she seemed almost frightened to provide it. Mother presented her family history in one session. It seems that as a young child, Mother's mother would periodically go "insane" and chase her around the house with an ax. The grandmothers "attacks" were believed to be a result of her reaching

menapause. During the presentation of the history, it became clear to Mother (and to Susie!) that mother was reaching menapause and was afraid to have a close relationship with her daughter since she might go insane at any moment and try to kill Susie. To Mother's amazement, Susie went over to her, hugged her, and said that it must have been "really hard for you, and I think I see why you won't spend time with me."

Family Role Playing. Family role playing involves the reversing of roles in sessions, or family members playing other family members in sessions. The reversals, in some stages of therapy may involve some family members playing the roles of therapists, but this is frequently not the case. Using this technique, family members cannot only experience what it is like to be other family members, but they can observe how other family members see them in the family. This technique will often make clear some of the clouded communication between members as to how they feel about them or see them. Following the role plays, often set up by the therapist, there is a discussion of the experience of the new roles and of watching those playing your role in the family.

CASE: The Smiths were a family of four, father an engineer in his early forties and mother a housewife in her late thirties with a history of severe depression and at least one hospitalization. The two children, Bob and Jimmy, were ages 13 and 9 respectively. The family came to therapy following a suicide attempt by Jimmy and a threat to kill himself a second time. He was briefly hospitalized by the parents who feared for his life. Mother was aloof and stand-

offish with both children, but especially with Jimmy whom she was not sure she even liked. Father worked two jobs to support the family and was rarely home. Jimmy was resistent to therapy and continually "attacked the therapist for prying into his family's life and trying to upset people. The therapist explained that the family was concerned that he might kill himself. The child made a sour face. The therapist then invited Jimmy to play the therapist while he played Jimmy's mother. Jimmy took to this immediately and played the therapist with gusto. The real therapist, as mother expressed a great deal of concern that her son might be suicidal. After a long description of the problem, Jimmy, as the therapist turned to the therapist playing him and said, "I wouldn't worry about Jimmy killing himself, he is probably just trying to get everyone's attention. Just pay a bit more attention to him and he will be fine." The remainder of the session after the role play, dealt with hos to pay more attention to the children.

Family Stress Ballet: In the family stress Ballet (Satir), family members are taught the how to pose in the four communicating position of the Placator, Super-reasonable, Blamer or Irrelevant. Members are then asked to stand in relationship to one another in the pose that feels the most comfortable and then to have each member change poses and notice the impact on others in the family as they attempt to achieve a new and comfortable pose. This technique is frequently used in reconstruction workshops with groups, but when applied to a family in treatment has proven to be effective in explicating, very vividly the relationship between family members.

It is, perhaps, important to say that this particular technique must be used selectively as some families are unwilling to use this technique or cannot, while playing themselves observe the entire scene. The therapist may help in this regard by pointing out relative positions when stopping the action. For some families, the commitment to change necessary to employ such a technique is lacking and it should not be attempted.

CASE: During a stress ballet with a family of five, the youngest little boy (about age 11) looked as though he were getting extremely boared and went and sat down. As he did so, he became aware that he was striking the "irrelevant" pose and realized that for quite a while he had not felt like he was an important member of the family. The family members also noticed that when he went and sat down, no changes were made in their poses. They became aware that, indeed, he was irrelevant to them.

Family Sculpting and Family Portraits: As described above and in the work of Papp (1973 and 1976) and Duhl, Duhl and Kantor (1973), family sculptures can be used in the treatment of troubled and well families. It involved the representing of the family through the view of one of it's members in the form of a scene or picture. Members of the scene are then asked to describe their feelings to the sculptor. In the family portrait, one member pretends to be the photographer and he or she sets up a family post which is most to his or her liking. Following the picture, family members discuss their feelings about the position they have in the portrait, and may also notice the relationship of other family members to one another.

CASE: In a family portrait of a family of sic, Father, the photographer, placed his wife standing on a chair with himself and the children standing below her. She was quite unaware, as were two of the children, that Father looked up to her in the least. This lead to a discussion of the fact that Mother felt she received little respect from the family while Father did, in fact, respect her a great deal.

I believe that the above techniques have proven to be effective for a number of reasons. First they allow for a different perspective on the patterns of family interaction. They allow for the "translation" of forces into a different representational system, one that is more concrete and one that can more easily then be structurally and experientially changed.

A second important factor is that these techniques require active participation of all family members, sometimes a therapeutic step in and of itself. Family members experience themselves as working together to gain something that will, obstensibly be of use to them as a family. This motivation can easily be carried over into the making of changes in the patterns of interaction for the good of the family members.

These techniques also provide information to family members who may have previously had none. This is especially the case with children who may have never been told of the experiences of their parents as children. This communication of common experience between the generations often paves the way for further communications.

Finally, children have an opportunity to watch as their parents struggle to understand their own families, not only as parents, but as children. This may open up the possibility that the children may be able to understand their own families and communicate to their own parents.

There are many other reconstruction techniques not mentioned here. I believe, however, that using the family, in therapy as a dynamic resource to itself cannot be overlooked as an effective therapeutic tool, separate and in some cases in addition to the primary work of the therapist.

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